

# STATE OF ALASKA

## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES DIVISION OF STATEWIDE PLANNING

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COPY

June 14, 2000

Mr. Walt Wrede  
Borough Manager  
Lake and Peninsula Borough  
P.O. Box 495  
King Salmon, AK 99613

Re: SW Transportation Plan Airport Improvement Analysis Technical Memorandum

Dear <sup>Walt</sup>Mr. ~~Wrede~~:

Thank you for your letter of April 10 in which you cited several shortcomings noted in the draft *Airport Improvement Analysis Technical Memorandum*, as well as offering additional input. I apologize for the long delay in responding to your concerns; there were several issues to resolve with our consultant team, and I thank you for being patient. I will try to address your comments here.

First, we acknowledge the inadequacy of the draft analysis. Our own comments to the consultant were seven pages in length. Incomplete data was compounded by errors. We are in the process of revising the analysis in its entirety. We wanted to get the draft out the door in time for comments at the April 7 SWAMC meeting. In retrospect, we should have given it a more stringent internal review. Concerning your specific points:

● Cargo Statistics inaccurate and underestimated - We have revisited the numbers and included USPS bypass mail statistics for consistency. Some obviously low (and a few high) numbers were attributable to errors in data entry which have been corrected.

\* Model inappropriate for region - We agree there are several difficulties with applying the model as developed for the YK region. However, we believe the basic approach and objectives are valid. Differences between the regions in commercial activity, particularly fishing and tourism, have indeed been accounted for in the model developed by the consultant - in the form of jobs and income - only the data was in error. Our hope is to develop a methodology for determining when and where the airport master planning process should be applied, and to have an idea of what improvements are most critical to the region as a whole. Right now we have no specified method, relying on a combination of order in the rotation (based on the last update), number of complaints, and available

funds. We also feel that identifying and examining likely fleet replacement aircraft-appropriate to regional air carrier operations is valuable both for us in anticipating facility needs and for the air carriers in airframe selection. YK aviation model developer Dr. Bob Whitford met with the consultant in mid-May and discussed the model and utility of its results. We believe the additional technical work performed to improve the data quality and better develop the results will prove extremely valuable to the region in the long run, and it will resolve most of your concerns.

●Not imputing fish value - We acknowledge the confusing language in the footnote, and will try to make it clearer in the revision. Because fish landings are variable and seasonal, and exports a matter of market value, we felt it would be inappropriate for the analysis to base its findings on peak season exports. Nor did we feel it was appropriate to estimate an across-the-board percentage of fish cargo vs. total cargo, since exports tend to be concentrated at a limited number of larger airports. Separating fish value from other cargo is compounded by the fact that air cargo statistics do not distinguish fish or fish product from other cargo. Year-round cargo (including fuel) imported to the communities appeared to us to be a more reliable and consistent driver of air cargo needs at each community.

●Future demand analysis - Predicting demand is probably the most controversial part of any plan. The population, employment and income figures used were developed by the University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) and they were factored into the demand analysis which was developed in an earlier technical memorandum (*Travel Demand Forecasts*) and applied to the Airport Improvement Analysis. The overall demand figures for the region were not questioned. The concern we heard expressed about the demand figures in previous discussions back in 1998 was the appropriateness of applying the regional trend as a whole to individual communities. We agree this is unrealistic. The airport master planning process is the ultimate determinant of an individual airport's design characteristics, not the area transportation plan. The purpose of this analysis is to look at the regional air system as a whole, and to give us clues as to enhancing the regional air network, not to determine the needs of each individual community. For that purpose we feel the demand figures are sufficient. If a sector of the region shows an amazing growth trend in the next few years which invalidates the ISER data, then we will review the analysis and if necessary adjust the plan. The beauty of this analysis is that you will have something you can compare future developments to and make adjustments accordingly. Our pledge to you is that the area transportation plan will be dynamic, not a bookshelf decoration. We don't stop area planning simply because the area plan is approved.

●Infrastructure vs. Market Forces - The analysis does not assume that current air traffic satisfies current demand, except from the standpoint of current market price. If the price dropped, we would expect an increase in the demand for services. We agree that additional infrastructure would help to lower costs, and the savings passed on to consumers would generate additional demand. However, we cannot assume that runway lengthening at any given community will generate more value for the region as a whole. What is more plausible is that some communities within the region will become more

attractive economically and others may become less so. If the increased infrastructure pays for itself, then communities should have no difficulty in assuming ownership from the State. Yet there is tremendous reluctance to do so. Our approach to planning is to target certain improvements that can pass along benefits to a fairly large subset of the region. This is why we are taking a systems approach to aviation and looking at how road improvements can help enhance the system as well. As I mentioned earlier, the draft analysis was deficient in data, and the recommendations were therefore faulty. Our preliminary information from the consultant is that the revised analysis will produce more substantial demand quantities and indicate a need for several facility improvements not shown in the draft.

\*Minimum runway length - You stated the Borough believes that minimum runway length should be increased from 3,300 feet to 5,000 feet. We understand the needs expressed for cargo delivery, fuel delivery, economic development and emergency medical flights. We believe this issue is one to be addressed in the Aviation System Plan, as it is not region-specific. Concerning your policy suggestion for expansions where justified by economic development and community willingness, we think it has merit and is worth further discussion with our Statewide Aviation Office and the Federal Aviation Administration Airports Division. Generally speaking, our federal transportation agency partners have been more open in recent years to the idea of partnership arrangements. This is also an issue with statewide implications, dealt with more appropriately in the Aviation System Plan.

•Port Heiden - Thank you for the information on Port Heiden functioning as a postal and freight hub for the communities in the southern part of the Borough. We are considering listing Port Heiden as a regional hub airport, although doing so does not affect the analysis.

●Egegik - We agree the omission of Egegik was erroneous on our part. Egegik will be included in the revised analysis.

•Chignik - Thank you for this information. We are aware of the Mitrofanina Valley being identified as the preferred site for a multi-community airport by the three Chignik communities. The bullet on page 4 of the draft is misleading, indicating that the existing City of Chignik airport will be used instead. This is not necessarily so. Our analysis assumes the population of all three communities would be served from a single facility, and uses the Chignik airport as the “reference facility” for determining if some improvement is actually warranted by the projected demand. We will leave the ultimate site selection to the airport master planning process.

•Levelock Airport relocation FY00-01 - We have taken the Fiscal Year 2000-02 Aviation Improvement Program (AIP) projects (which include the Levelock project) and incorporated them into the plan’s baseline. This does not affect the analysis, except that its recommendations will take into account these improvements are being implemented.

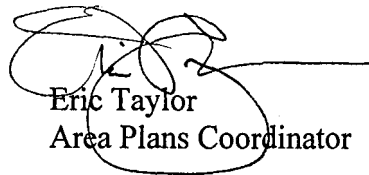
We agree that air transport will continue to be the most viable mode of transportation for movement of goods and services in the region for the foreseeable future, and we share your concern for getting the best analysis possible. We put a lot of the SW Plan's effort into analyzing roads because, with a few exceptions, there aren't any in SW Alaska now. Every community currently has an airport and most have regularly scheduled air service. Trying to identify needed enhancements from a system perspective seems like the way to go. We attribute many of the concerns we have heard expressed in your letter and others to inadequate data and incorrect data entry in the draft technical memorandum. We hope that you will find the revised airport improvement analysis, when completed, credible in its data, methodology, and findings. We anticipate completion of the revised report in July.

Should you have additional comments or questions please feel free to contact me via letter, email (eric\_taylor@dot.state.ak.us), toll free phone 1-888-PLANDOT or toll-free fax 1-888-PLANFAX. We have added your letter and this response to our SW Transportation Plan Correspondence Reading Room on the internet at the following URL:

[http://www.dot.state.ak.us/external/state\\_wide/planning/swcorr/swcorr.html](http://www.dot.state.ak.us/external/state_wide/planning/swcorr/swcorr.html)

Thanks again for your interest and concern.

Sincerely,



Eric Taylor  
Area Plans Coordinator